DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 883 CE 053 827

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TITLE Why Adults Participate in Learning Activities in Jordan: Guidelines for Recruitment.
PUB DATE Oct 89
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (Atlantic City, NJ, October 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Adult Students; Developing Nations; *Dropout Prevention; Educational History; Foreign Countries; Guidelines; Incentives; *Literacy Education; Participation; School Holding Power; *Student Recruitment; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Jordan

ABSTRACT

Knowledge of Jordan's historical background and the role of well-educated individuals and groups in motivating adults to participate in learning activities is essential for finding ways to recruit and retain adults in education programs. Some means that have proven effective include the following: (1) persuading religious and social leaders to exert their influence in getting adults to come to literacy classes; (2) door-to-door canvassing; (3) organized trips to historical sites in Jordan as an inducement to recruiting and retaining students; (4) providing adult students with an identification card that can be used to obtain low-cost medical care; (5) forming adult committees for dealing with religious, social, educational, and nursery school affairs; (6) using religious committees to recruit adults; (7) having women visit other women and tell them about educated Muslim women; (8) guest speakers lecturing about the value of education; (9) holding annual exhibitions to display the work of adult literacy students; and (10) hiring highly qualified teachers to teach and deal with adult learners. These and other techniques have proved to be effective in recruiting and retaining adult students in Jordan. (KC)

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Why Adults Participate in Learning Activities in Jordan: Guidelines for Recruitment

Kamal Nimer, Ph.D.

In order to appreciate the role of well-educated individuals and groups in motivating adults to participate in learning activities, it is appropriate to examine Jordan's historical background. The following background information is presented in order to shed light on the country of Jordan and on the field of adult and continuing education in particular.

Jordan has a total population of about five million people. The fertility rate is 3.8%. Consequently, 53% of the total population is under fifteen years of age (al-Masri, 1981).

Since early times, rulers of Jordan founded schools with a view to a heavenly reward (Totah, 1926). Professor Nicholson said: "Besides honoring and encouraging the learned, al-Hakam--the Caliph--took measures to spread the benefit of education amongst the poorest of his subjects. With this view he founded 27 free schools in the capital and paid the teachers out of his private purse" (al-Tal, 1978, p. 29). Many such schools were founded in Jordan to teach students free of charge and to offer monthly allowances to professors and students.

In 1920, Jordan became part of the British mandate over Palestine. During the period of colonial control, the British did not show much interest in improving the education of the population of Jordan. Schools were not prepared to accept more than 45% of the applicants (Ali, 1973). Education was directed toward maintaining the status quo for fear that widespread formal education would contribute to unrest among the governed people. In 1945, the British mandate was cancelled and the "Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan" was declared. During this era, increased attention was given to education in general, and to adult education in particular.

Adult education in Jordan is synonymous with eradication of illiteracy. Most efforts in the field of adult education are designed to be campaigns against illiteracy. According to the standards in Middle Eastern countries, the minimum level of competency for any citizen to be considered literate is to be able to read and understand a paragraph from any daily newspaper, to be able to express himself by writing one paragraph correctly, and to be able to use simple computational math necessary for his daily survival (Ali, 1973). Adult education is defined as "each nonformal education which is offered to a person aged ten years or over who is not studying in any school" (Hakim, 1982, p. 30).

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In 1948, a systematic effort to educate illiterate officers and soldiers was launched. In 1951, the United Nations established literacy campaigns among Palestinian refugees in Jordan. In 1953, King Husain expressed his desire to the Minister of Education to have evening classes organized to educate illiterates. The Islamic Council in Jerusalem sent a letter to the Minister of Education in 1955 requesting the instruction of prisoners in reading, writing and handcraft. Such efforts continued year after year and led to a reduction in the percentage of illiteracy from about 90% in 1946, to 67.6% in 1961, to 51.8% in 1970 and to 42% in 1980 (Jordanian Ministry of Education, 1980).

Aware that illiteracy of such magnitude hinders socio-economic development projects in the country, many well-educated individuals, groups and associations have studied this problem and researched the factors behind it. Such educated and interested parties have developed a well-organized plan implementing various methods to motivate adults to participate in learning activities designed to eradicate their illiteracy within a reasonable period of time.

An active recruitment effort is essential. The best teachers, materials and facilities are worthless if potential students are not made aware of the program and encouraged to participate. In traditional Jordanian society, where religious and social leaders have an influence on adults, they should exert this influence. In this Middle Eastern society, guests are to be respected and honored. Therefore, door-to-door canvassing has proven to be a highly effective means to recruit potentional students. Recruiters were hired and trained to make this contact. Some students were asked to assist either by making door-to-door contact or by referring friends, relatives and acquaintances.

Additional techniques have been shown to be effective methods which can be used to convince illiterates to enroll in adult education classes and to decrease the rate of dropout or absenteeism. For example:

(1) Organized trips to various historical sites in Jordan and to other centers devoted to adult education provided a strong motivational factor. One of the teachers who suggested this method described its usefulness:

> Historical places in Jordan are many. The majority of our illiterate adults never visit these places because it is expensive for any individual. At the same time, they are interested in visiting these places. By organizing these trips during the late weeks of the course, we noticed that the rate of dropout, the most serious problem, has decreased.

(2) Another incentive for the adult learner is to provide him with an identification card which can be used to obtain low-cost medical care from pharmacies and doctors who have agreed to support the campaign against illiteracy by providing special treatment for participants and their dependents. This method has been a very effective means to attract many illiterates to adult literacy classes.

(3) Active recruitment efforts may be undertaken by forming adult committees for dealing with religious, social, educational and nursery school affairs. The purpose of such committees is to organize activities relevant to adult concerns in each area, and to encourage adults to join classes designed especially for them.

Recognizing the usefulness of spiritual inducements for attracting illiterates to classes was encouraged by Unesco: "The ability to read is often desired, if not as an end in itself, then as the direct road to spiritual and cultural enrichment. In both East and West, there is always a proportion of prospective literacy students whose chief aim is to be able to read the sacred book of their religion" (Burnet, 1965, p. 30).

A volunteer women's association has announced that their religious committee has successfully recruited many adults. This committee followed several methods in order to achieve its goals, among them:

(a) The committee contacted preachers in the mosques to encourage them to exert their influence on members of their communities by convincing illiterate adults to join classes. This method was successful in many areas because preachers are still the most respected persons in Jordanian society. The cooperation of mosque leaders convinced many adults to join classes held in adult education centers.

Historically, the most reputable institutions of adult education which developed out of the Muslim religious tradition were the mosques. Since adults come to the mosque to perform their five daily prayers, it became common for worshipers to stay a few minutes and listen as the preacher explained to them the meanings of the Quran and the Prophetic traditions. Preachers should seize these opportunities to remind those in attendance that Islam encourages education: the first word of the Glorious Quran--the final revelation--is "Read". The Prophet said, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim."

(b) Another method used successfully by the volunteer women's committee was door-to-door contact. Knowing that the rate of illiteracy among women in the Middle East is the highest in the world, members of this committee visited women at home and convinced them to join literacy classes. In an interview with a female student, one woman said:

I never knew that many Muslim women were famous for their accomplishments in various fields of knowledge until a group of women from the adult education center visited me. They told me about Nafisah, a famous scholar six centuries ago; Sukaina, who was most famous during her era for her criticism of poetry; and Umm al-Darda, who used to deliver lectures in the Mosque of Umar in Jerusalem which the Caliph Sulaiman regularly attended. In that visit I was told about many such women. They convinced me to enroll and to encourage others to enroll in this center, so that we may be able to be like those famous ancestors--who knows?

(c) Guest speakers were called by the religious committee to lecture about the value of education in Islam in this earthly life, as well as in the life to come. In an interview, an adult student who had enrolled in adult education classes after attending such a lecture said:

Once I listened to a guest speaker who mentioned two traditions of the Prophet. First, he mentioned that the Prophet had encouraged educating females by saying, "Anyone who has two daughters, educates them properly and takes care of them, they will be a shield for him against hell-fire in the Hereafter." I encouraged my wife to attend the adult literacy center and soon I will send my daughter to school.

The second tradition which I heard for the first time was, "When a believer enters paradise in the Hereafter, an angel will say to him, "Read and ascend." With each verse from the Quran he reads, he will ascend a step in paradise and it has been said that the steps of paradise are equal to the verses of the Glorious Quran. Upon hearing this, I approached the speaker to inquire about the fastest method which would help me to read Quran, so he directed me to this adult education center.

Social committees, as well, have played an active role in the recruitment of illiterate adults to register and remain in adult education classes. Aware that many parents and husbands have attached only secondary value to the education of women, some social committees have set out to correct this attitude. Frequently, they have found that those who place no value on the education of women are illiterate themselves. In an interview with a father who sent his daughter to adult literacy classes, the father said:

I used to believe that it was unnecessary for girls to be educated. But when a social committee team visited me, they convinced me that it is easier for a girl to be married who is able to read and write than one who is illiterate. Her opportunities for marriage are even

greater if she also has some skills such as sewing, weaving, typing and embroidery. These skills will enable her to be more helpful to her husband by providing an additional source of income. After hearing this, I encouraged my daughter to join an adult literacy center (Nimer, 1986).

Using such methods, social committees in primarily rural and Bedouin areas have convinced many fathers and husbands to allow their daughters and wives to enroll and remain in adult literacy classes.

"You can't teach an old dog new tricks" is a common saying in the United States. In Middle Eastern countries, there is a widespread belief that "teaching a young person is as easy as writing on water, but teaching an adult is as difficult as engraving on a rock." As a result of this popularly held notion, many adults abstain from enrollment in adult literacy classes. Any adult who wishes to join these classes must endure much discouraging criticism. Social committees worked to overcome this major problem. The committees held numerous meetings, showed many movies, distributed large amounts of printed information, and called upon religious leaders to raise the consciousness of the people and to remind them that Muslims must "seek knowledge from cradle to grave."

(d) Annual exhibitions were held to display the work of adult literacy students. Ordinarily, these exhibitions are sponsored by a high official. The first general exhibition in Jordan was held under the auspices of Queen Noor, who distributed gifts, awards and certificates to those who had completed their studies in the literacy centers.

Knowing that the lack of qualified teachers was among the leading causes of dropout, associations began to hire well-qualified teachers and to teach them how to deal with adult learners.

Many groups depended on volunteer recruitment efforts because they were aware of popular dislike for political leaders and widespread attitudes of distrust felt toward those leaders when they called for campaigns against illiteracy. Volunteer recruiters who were chosen from among the people themselves succeeded in convincing many adults that the literacy programs were for the adults' own benefit. The recruiters' objective was to help adults feel comfortable enough to participate in the classes.

These and other techniques proved to be effective means to recruit adults and retain them in adult literacy classes until graduation. Adult literacy programs need not limit their recruitment techniques to the ones discussed here, just as they need not limit themselves to literacy training. Adults must be trained in various technical and health fields beyond literacy

competency, in order to prepare them to play larger, more active roles in the society and in all spheres of life.

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